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The Necessity of Increased Funding for Gifted Education and More Training for Teachers in Charge of Identifying Gifted Students

by Sarah Lichtenwalter

(Education 1100)

Abstract

This paper examines five published articles that explore the topics of funding gifted education and providing adequate teacher training for teachers in charge of helping and identifying gifted students in classrooms. It exposes the details of the unsettling lack of funding for gifted education programs in the United States and breaks down the important factors of gifted education training and the many benefits that come from it. It also utilizes suggestions and analyses from the authors of the articles to present suggestions and potential solutions to the problems that gifted students in America, whether aware of their situation or not, are facing.

Keywords: gifted education, funding, training, identifying

Increasing Funding and Teacher Training for Gifted Education Programs

Various studies have shown the amount of training teachers have obtained in the area of gifted education to be an important component of the identification and successful academic performance of gifted students. The amount of funding gifted education programs receive is also an important factor in determining whether or not gifted students will be helped or identified. This paper examines each item in its own context, but also how constituents of each can be utilized to improve the current system regarding gifted education in the United States.

Funding for gifted education programs today is inadequate and upsetting. The National Association for Gifted Children (2009) notes that the federal government provides only two cents of every hundred dollars spent on education to gifted children (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009, p. 2). Statistics of funding from the state level are hardly more impressive. In the 2008-2009 school year, 13 states provided absolutely no funds to support gifted education programs. For the millions of dollars spent on education every year, 5 states spent \$1 million or less on gifted education programs, and 11 states spent a mere \$10 million or more. There are 32 states that mandate some level of gifted education, but only 6 of those states fund the mandate (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009).

Not only do gifted education programs suffer from a severe lack of funds, they also experience frequent cuts from their tight budgets. Ward (2005) discusses how the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is negatively affecting gifted students around the United States by cutting elective programs for gifted children in order to raise money to boost the test scores of the lower-performing students (Ward, 2005, p. 46). Seeing as how the No Child Left Behind Act is still in place in 2010, it does not look as if this situation will change in the immediate future due to the ongoing high-stakes testing culture.

The correlation between funding and academic results in gifted students becomes apparent when it is mentioned that the vast majority of schools identifying no gifted students serve students from low-income families or students who are learning English (Birdsall & Correa, 2007). In their article, Birdsall and Correa (2007) describe a case from California in which a boy transferred schools within his district. His old school, which was not one of high status, had diagnosed him with mild retardation due to his history of poor grades, disorganized schoolwork, and bad handwriting, but his new teacher at his new school recognized some of his traits as those of gifted students. She arranged

a formal assessment for him. He scored so high that Johns Hopkins gave him a scholarship for its summer institute, and he is now doing extremely well in science, math, and computers (Birdsall & Correa, 2007, p. 21). The funding of his schools made a difference in his education. In his particular case, his teacher's training also made a difference, which will be discussed later. Birdsall & Correa (2007) also note that in California public schools, after schools develop and submit a plan describing how they will identify and service gifted and talented students, the state only provides about nine dollars per gifted student to the school (Birdsall & Correa, 2007, p. 21). It is unclear whether the funding or the teacher training levels had a larger effect in the boy's situation, but the lack of adequate funds certainly did not help.

Moving onto the importance of adequate teacher training in gifted education, teachers need to understand the needs of gifted children and how certain cultures value their gifts because those students may otherwise lose interest in school, become bored, or develop poor work habits and behavioral problems (Davison, 1996). Gifted students may need certain accommodations in school to reach their full potential. Research shows that the achievement levels of gifted students drop dramatically when they are expected to work at the same pace as their classmates who are not gifted (Birdsall & Correa, 2007). It is important to keep these students motivated if they are to have a shot at using their skills in the future.

Research yields an overwhelming amount of positive effects that come out of training teachers in gifted education. Davison (1996) found that teachers with the proper training show more enthusiasm and support for gifted programs and work to provide a more differentiated curriculum rather than merely adding more content. She also found that they use more teaching techniques to ease boredom, give students time to pursue their personal interests, and encourage learning outside of the classroom (Davison, 1996, p. 42). Along with the many positives that arise from gifted education training, it should be noted that giving teachers little to no gifted education training results in negative effects in the classroom. Untrained teachers commonly display more apathy and hostility toward gifted students and are prone to thinking giftedness shows itself through high academic grades. These teachers are also likely to simply note a gifted child's particular interest instead of encouraging the student to pursue it; they believe the student should still spend time in all subjects rather than focus on the ones they are gifted in (Davison 1996).

Gifted education training can reap benefits far beyond putting gifted students on a good track. Blumen-Pardo (2002) discusses an experiment done on gifted and non-gifted students in Peru. School-related and teacher-related factors affect student performance more in developing countries than developed countries, and teachers in developing countries such as Peru tend to think they are inadequately qualified to teach gifted students. The experiment was designed to give teachers of 231 second-graders some gifted education training through a workshop and see if and how the performance of students in an experimental group changed in the classroom compared to those of a control group (Blumen-Pardo, 2002, p. 47-48). The teachers' attitudes were going to be put to the test. At the end of the experiment, it was concluded that both gifted and non-gifted students in the experimental group improved in their academic performance, surpassing the control group altogether (Blumen-Pardo, 2002). It is truly compelling to put forth the possibility of more educational opportunities for all students, not just gifted students, through something as simple as increased gifted education training for teachers.

The lack of adequate teacher training in some schools or in some individual teachers can be a result of many factors, but in some cases, the problem could trace back to certain teachers' institutions of certification. In her research, Davison (1996) found that Iowa colleges and universities only meet the state minimum standard of gifted student training by giving students in their education programs one to three hours of instruction on the topic (Davison, 1996, p. 41). Meeting the minimum when it comes to training may not be enough, just as meeting the minimum on standardized tests in

our high-stakes testing culture is not always good enough; in both cases, there is potential to slip under the bar if the knowledge and skills are not properly maintained.

Colleges and universities are not the only ones to blame for the problem of inadequate gifted education training. The training can take place in many other forms than a standard college course; Birdsall & Correa suggest that training regarding the identification of gifted and talented students should not be isolated from professional development activities such as those concerning the needs of students learning English (Birdsall & Correa, 2007, p. 21). The training for the teachers can simply be an added component to other training already in place, such as meetings in schools or through outside workshops available to teachers.

Discussion

Regarding the funding of gifted education programs, it is important to realize that the economy and the acts put forth by the United States are not constant figures. If the No Child Left Behind Act is terminated in the future, it is possible that the high-stakes testing culture will fade and funds will stop being drained from gifted education programs for that particular reason. In such a case, funding would need to be reexamined without the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act and with consideration for the state of the nation's economy and federal budget at such a time.

It should also be taken into consideration that not all poorly funded schools are completely absent of trained teachers in gifted education. It is possible that some teachers in those schools will have the skills to identify gifted students and try to help those students as best as they can, with or without funding. Some teachers deliberately work in poor school districts because they feel they can have a positive impact. It cannot necessarily be assumed that a school in a low-income community or in a state that does not financially support gifted education will not identify any gifted students, although unfortunately in some schools, it still is the case.

Blumen-Pardo (2002) notes that in the experiment conducted in Peru, personal attributes and skills such as comprehension, memory, evaluation, problem solving skills, and stress management skills may require a longer time to develop in the students (Blumen-Pardo, 2002, p.55). If her consideration is true, it is possible that test results for the same group of students would turn out differently in a few years. To avoid drawing conclusions from inaccurate or incomplete results, the same experiment should be carried out in the future on students of multiple age groups. From that point, all of the results should be analyzed and compared.

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